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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the high teacher attrition rate in special education and the importance of teacher retention, and provides teacher retention strategies and activities for educators and administrators. Information for the guide was obtained through discussion groups, interviews, and a written survey. Three sections identify strategies and corresponding activities for classroom-based personnel, school-based administrators, and for district personnel at a district-wide administrative level. Strategies include: (1) teachers should get involved in professional development opportunities offered by school administration; (2) teachers should facilitate student responsibility for accepting leadership from alternate staff so that they have opportunities to leave the classroom when necessary; (3) teachers shouldn't compromise the quality of their work by overextending themselves; (4) principals need to be supportive of teacher decisions; (5) principals should provide opportunities for special and general educators to collaborate through teams and cooperative teaching opportunities; (6) principals should reward teachers with appropriate mechanisms; (7) district-wide administrators should educate all principals, assistant principals, and center principals regarding roles and responsibilities of special education personnel; and district-wide administrators should provide professional development opportunities related to teaching educators advocacy skills and general management skills. (Contains 12 references.) (CR)

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Retention of Special Education Professionals

A Practical Guide of Strategies and Activities for Educators and Administrators

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Hasselkorn & Calkins, 1993, p. ii

Hang on to your dream to teach.

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Retention of Special Education Professionals:

A Practical Guide of Strategies and Activities for Educators and Administrators

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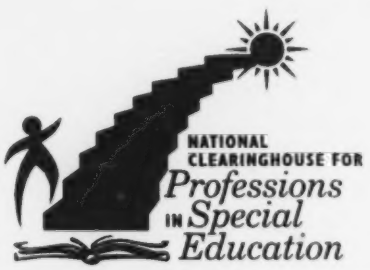

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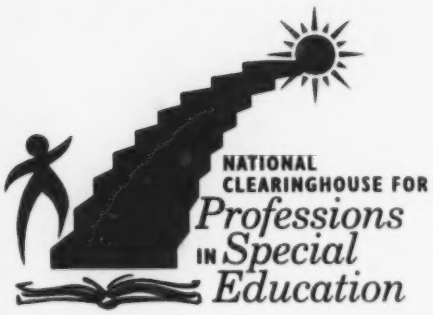

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Your commitment toward the education of students and your expertise regarding the importance of a quality teaching force are apparent. I thank you for your time and dedication.

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Retention of Special Education Professionals: A Practical Guide of Strategies and Activities for Educators and Administrators

The Importance of Retention

Teacher turnover undermines the quality of educational service provision in our nation's schools. Researchers indicated that strategies to address teacher attrition represent a promising approach toward minimizing teacher shortages and postulated that teacher turnover is a significant factor causing personnel shortages that are apparent in some special education disciplines and in some geographic areas (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, & Weber, 1995). High teacher attrition affects the number of unfilled positions within a school, the number of positions that are held by unqualified personnel, and the personnel costs of filling vacant positions. Descriptive and empirical findings suggested factors that affect the retention of qualified, diverse special education teaching professionals (Brownell & Smith, 1993) and quantitative methodologies examined the variables that influence sources of teacher supply (Boe, Cook, Kaufman, & Danielson, 1996). Although federal dollars were allocated to explore the multifaceted problem of teacher attrition, data indicate that teacher turnover continues to be a problem within our nation's schools.

Qualitative and quantitative inquiry regarding this phenomenon is prevalent and the literature is replete with findings and suggestions. However, little information is available that identifies practical, realistic school-based practices that consider the resources available to local education agencies. School administrators often struggle with research-based suggestions regarding how to implement these recommendations. However, an analysis of several federally-funded projects may provide school personnel with realistic solutions to the attrition problem.

In October 1991, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), Department of Education (DOE) awarded cooperative agreements to three organizations:

- The Eugene Research Institute–Silver City Unified School District.
- The Research Triangle Institute–Memphis City Schools.
- San Diego State University–San Diego Unified School District and San Jose Unified School District.

The purposes of these programs were to facilitate a better understanding of teacher retention and to develop strategies and solutions that could be incorporated into a school system's strategic plan. The working papers associated with these projects contain detailed analyses of the processes and outcomes of the retention/attrition research (Billingsley, Gersten, Gillman, & Morvant, 1995; Cegelka, 1995; Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, & Billingsley, 1995; Gersten, Keating, & Yovanoff, 1995; Pyecha & Levine, 1995). Research offered the following practical solutions:

- Formation of a stakeholder's group at the state and district levels with a vision statement.
- Implementation of a strategic plan at the state and district levels.
- Use of electronic mediums to communicate at the national, state, and district levels.

- Solicit input from classroom educators regarding research projects.
- Complete "environmental scanning," whereby, factors that affect attrition are identified.
- Increase communication flow from administration offices to class room educators.
- Provide collaborative and meaningful professional development opportunities for educators.
- Provide opportunities for shared decision making.
- Address the following factors that relate to job design:

  1. Role overload: "Too much to do too little time." Increase planning time available to teachers and use paraprofessionals in the classroom. Caseload problems emanate not only because of the larger numbers of students in special education classes, but also because of the varying complexities of individual caseloads. Teachers need ongoing information regarding current special education topical issues such as the movement toward noncategorical placements, inclusion, diversity, and second language learners. Reduce the paperwork and bureaucratic requirements for teachers.

  2. Lack of autonomy: Facilitate teacher involvement in decision making particularly as it relates to curriculum decision and classroom instructional materials. Involve educators in district-wide educational policy decisions.

  3. School culture: Implement activities that facilitate the sharing of information between general and special educators.

  4. Role conflict: Role confusion emanates from poor information flow, changing responsibilities of teachers, and the stress associated with the prioritization of work activities. Communicate with educators through the supervisory process regarding performance and role expectations.

The Intent of This Publication

This publication represents a compilation of information obtained through discussion groups, interviews, and a written survey. The strategies identified are intended to be a summarization of retention strategies that have practical application. However, the strategies identified are supported by research, much of which is described in the preceding section.

It is hoped that classroom professionals, school-based administrators, and district administrators can use this publication as a guide to stimulate thought regarding the application of retention strategies within their own venues. We intend this publication to be used in conjunction with a recruitment strategy guidebook developed by the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education entitled, *34 Activities to Promote Careers in Special Education*. Readers are encouraged to share both of these publications with their colleagues.

Publication Format

In order to provide a reader with a comprehensive perspective of retention strategies, this reference is divided into three sections. ***Section I*** describes strategies and corresponding activities that ***classroom-based personnel*** can implement. Many of these strategies and activities require little time or resource investment but may go a long way toward helping classroom practitioners feel vested in their role and position. ***Section II*** identifies strategies and corresponding activities that can be implemented by ***school-based administrators***. These strategies reflect the perspective that there are internal socio-cultural and organizational variables that impact upon whether district employees stay or leave their education positions. Some of these activities may require an investment of school resources and may involve a time commitment by administrative professionals. However, this initial expenditure will be superseded by the long-term cost benefit of the implementation of retention strategies. The final section, ***Section III***, presents strategies and associated activities that can be implemented by district personnel at a ***district-wide administrative level***. If the entire school district is not committed toward staffing policies and decisions that facilitate the retention of education professionals, strategies implemented by individuals and those strategies implemented at the school level will be ineffective. District-wide commitment must be evident in activities related to organizational structure, personnel and staffing policies, and practices related to career development. An investment at all levels and by all constituencies ensures that the strategies that emanate from research and are reflected in practice will have long-lasting positive effect for the education profession.

The organizational schema in each section are designed to help a reader differentiate between specific strategies recommended by practitioners and their corresponding activities.

In each section the strategies and corresponding activities are indicated by the following icons:

strategies activities

The strategies identified were garnered through multiple data collection mechanisms including: interviews, focus groups, and literature analysis. The descriptive activities detailed that correspond with these strategies were provided to NCPSE by practicing professionals through interview and survey methodologies. In each case, professionals were asked to present their thoughts and personal experiences as they relate to the specific strategies identified. A validation process with representatives from each domain, including an educator, a school-based administrator, and a district-wide administrator, transpired to ensure the consistency of strategies and activities as they relate to retention. We hope this publication is beneficial to your successful implementation of initiatives related to retention and your professional experiences within the education field continue to be productive and meaningful. We welcome your feedback and comments pertinent to the strategies identified or activities described in this publication and have provided a *Request for More Strategies Form* as the format for your response. This resource is not intended as a "one size fits all" approach toward the retention of professionals within educational settings. However, it can serve as a comprehensive foundation from which to build and continuously evaluate retention programs that are consistent with the needs of specific environments.

"Although not advertised, I have found my school system is willing to accept petitions related to request for funding for professional conferences and meetings that do not require extensive travel."

Strategies

I. Strategies Classroom-Based Personnel Can Implement

Get involved in professional development opportunities offered by school administration.

"I noticed that our district was having an inservice regarding collaboration. I volunteered to attend on behalf of my department."

"Although not advertised, I have found my school system is willing to accept petitions related to requests for funding for professional conferences and meetings that do not require extensive travel."

Facilitate student responsibility for accepting leadership from alternate staff so that I have the opportunity to leave the classroom when necessary.

"I realized that because I was responsible for student safety, I couldn't leave my classroom even to go to the restroom or to get a drink of water. So, I made arrangements with the general education teacher whose classroom was adjacent to mine to cover my class when necessary, in return, I would cover her class. It was nice to have the reciprocal support."

Be an advocate for yourself and your profession.

"I noticed that our county was having a health career fair to introduce middle school youth to various professions. As a school-based speech language pathologist, I expected that there would be representatives of the speech language pathology profession. However, I thought it would be important for students to learn about the opportunities for speech language pathologists to work in schools. I asked my principal if I could participate in the fair."

Read literature and the latest research. Be informed.

"I noticed that in our teacher's lounge there were very few magazines or publications which related to the teaching profession. I knew that our district subscribed to those publications available through professional organizations. However, the publications from these organizations never made their way to places where we as teachers could read them. I asked the administrative personnel in our school office if she would place these journals in the teacher's lounge on a weekly basis. Now, I feel like I can keep up with the current trends in our field."

Don't compromise the quality of your work by overextending yourself.

"As most special educators do not have subject specific certifications, become involved in setting your teaching schedule. Do not accept teaching subjects where you have limited or no expertise. It will become a very long year trying to keep up or obvious that you are uncomfortable and floundering."

Learn to evaluate the appropriateness of your employment site. Find the best fit between the demands of the job and your skills and interests.

"Evaluate the hierarchical structure of your system and determine the professional path you wish to follow. Within your performance evaluation system make sure you create a platform for discussion on appropriateness of employment style and professional advancement."

Engage in conversation with general education professionals to learn about what they think they need to know. Share your expertise and develop a presence in the building based on your knowledge and wisdom. We can learn by listening.

"The relationship with the general education professionals can be a win-win situation. Inclusion creates a situation where all staff must understand and be willing to modify their teaching for special needs populations. The majority of general education teachers are eager to learn methods to create positive learning experiences for all their students. While sharing your expertise in modification and adaptation you are afforded the opportunity to share knowledge about advanced content information."

Volunteer to be a conduit to educate other school personnel regarding special education issues.

"I developed and conducted 'chat and choose' sessions for both my team and school staff who expressed interest in particular special education topics, such as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). I developed flyers to encourage attendance and brought food for attendees to share during the informal discussion."

Ensure you are communicating with external constituents, including parents and community resource representatives.

"Our town was having a 'get to know your community day'. I felt this would be a great way for me to let the general public know what kinds of things we were doing in our elementary school. I also felt it would be an ideal way for me to learn about what kinds of resources were out there so, if I needed resources for parents or for my students, I would know where to refer people. My principal was supportive of my participation in this community event; he even said he received phone calls from local media to inquire further about some of the programs that I talked about at the community day. I even had my picture taken for the local paper and received a certificate for my participation. It is now hanging on my wall at school."

Capitalize on opportunities for positive visibility within and outside of your school.

"I look for opportunities on the world wide web to promote activities that are going on in my classroom. For instance, this year we participated in a virtual reality sailboat race (the Whitbread Race) through the Internet with school teams from around the world. My students and the school received national recognition for their participation and we had an opportunity to meet the United States Sailing Teams competing in this international event."

"Evaluate the hierarchical structure of your system and determine the professional path you wish to follow. Within your performance evaluation system make sure you create a platform for discussion on appropriateness of employment style and professional advancement."

"With the change in classroom population, collaborative teaching is becoming increasingly necessary. The scheduling of joint planning time is a key to the success of collaboration.

II. Strategies School-Based Administrators Can Implement

Principals need to present the attitude, "I want you to be here. You are important."

"I have found that the best way I can convey this is to encourage open communication with all of my staff. I set aside time each week for teachers to 'walk in' to my office and share concerns, issues, or just to touch base. I listen to their comments and if appropriate respond expeditiously. If there is any follow-up required, I personally get back to them always letting them know that I value their contributions and dedication to our school."

"E-mail has been particularly effective in helping me maintain communication with my staff. I also have initiated a monthly meeting with all of my staff with all special education, general education, and paraprofessionals. This provides all personnel with an opportunity to become involved in school-wide issues."

Principals need to be supportive of teacher decisions.

"As a principal I encourage open communication among administration, faculty, staff, and students. I meet with staff on a structured basis to discuss the school mission and the role that we each have in fulfilling this mission. I recognize that each of the professionals in this school has expertise and should be encouraged to participate in the decision-making process that affects this school. I guess I say thank you a lot and remember to ask, 'What do you think?'"

"It is also important to teach teachers how to do school-based decision making. I am there to provide resources and to cut the red tape, but I encourage classroom personnel to decide on their own what is good for the kids in their classrooms. It is important to support decision making, but I expect that the decisions that teachers make will positively impact upon the children in their classrooms."

Provide opportunities for special and general educators to collaborate through teams and cooperative teaching opportunities.

"With the change in classroom population, collaborative teaching is becoming increasingly necessary. The scheduling of joint planning time is a key to the success of collaboration. The teaching teams that we have established are very successful because the general education and special education teachers have time to select curricular objectives and plan accordingly. I provide those involved with time during their work day to plan for this collaborative teaching effort and I provide them with resources related to team teaching and collaboration."

"Resources provided regarding any classroom or teaching strategy need to be more than print or video. Resources need to be experiential. For instance, I sent a team of my teachers to several districts around our state to see collaboration in action. This provided my teachers with the opportunity to talk with those who were currently engaging in collaborative teaching. After the site visits I took our teachers to a local restaurant to debrief regarding their observations and learning. I left during this time because I felt it was important for them to discuss the personal implications of collaboration without feeling hindered by the presence of a school-based administrator."

"I also provide educators with the opportunity to job shadow each other or even exchange jobs, and I provide them with time to reflect on their experiences. To follow-up with the job shadowing experiences, I have brought the entire group together to share experiences as a whole."

Ensure that there are mentoring programs in place throughout an educator's professional development.

"We have a voluntary mentoring or professional network program in place in our school where seasoned professionals are paired with new professionals to share information and professional experiences. The educators who choose to participate are acknowledged with opportunities to participate in professional development programs where they can receive recertification points. I also started a formal induction program within our school as a forum to facilitate the development of these professional networks and information sharing experiences."

Reward teachers with appropriate mechanisms.

"I would hope that my ongoing communication with classroom personnel and my continued interest and respect for their work are reinforcing. I walk around, ask questions, and am a participatory style principal. However, I also know the value of tangible reinforcers and written performance evaluations. We also have been quite fortunate to have the support of local retail businesses. Retailers donate merchandise and gift certificates that we can use whenever reward items are appropriate. I think this makes our local businesses feel like that they are a part of the school system. Moreover, it says to school personnel that the community cares about what they do."

"I think tangible reinforcers are important. I build these expenses into the PTA budget and will pay for curriculum materials, money for classroom decorating, or pay for professional development conferences and meetings. I pay for tuition for classes or other opportunities that enable a teacher to earn recertification points. This is one of the best ways to compensate educators for their time and commitment."

"I start my weekly staff meetings with 'bravos'—an opportunity to report to the group teacher accomplishments. My staff feels great to be recognized by their peers. I share these bravos with parents and other school personnel."

"I provide teachers with release time. This time gives teachers a doublebreak."

"I gave all of the children in my school blank post-it notes. They use these post-its to place thank-you notes on the teachers classroom doors."

Ensure that all education professionals are being treated equitably.

"I have uniform policies and practices related to employment in our school that apply to all professionals. I hope that all educators, regardless of their discipline feel that the procedures we have established related to the culture and conditions within our school are equitable."

"I provide all educators with an opportunity to share professional information at meetings. I make sure that all faculty have ample opportunity to share their knowledge by including them in our meeting agendas. Simply, I treat special education teachers the same way that I treat general education teachers."

"We have a voluntary mentoring or professional network program in place in our school where seasoned professionals are paired with new professionals to share information

"Most important to planning is consistency and having it be an unencumbered time."

Be an advocate in your system to ensure that all education professionals have access to materials.

"During a recent math inservice day, I ensured that the money, materials, and training allocated for the inservice were equitable for all educational disciplines. By ensuring equity amongst teaching disciplines, you are diminishing the chances of school-labeling, such as they're special ed kids or they're general ed kids."

Ensure that your paraprofessionals and instructional aides are qualified and are consistently evaluated.

"We had a situation in our school where a teacher who taught children with behavioral disorders came to me to indicate that he felt that he was spending an inordinate amount of time supervising the paraeducator in his class. The teacher reported that because he didn't trust the skills of the aide, he did not feel comfortable leaving the class. When I assessed the situation I learned that the paraeducator did not have experience in working with children with behavioral disorders, thus, he did not have the knowledge or skills that are typically required in this position. During employee evaluations, I use this time to ensure that paraeducators are cognizant of their roles and responsibilities and have a clear understanding of their job descriptions."

Provide time for teachers to plan.

"Most important to planning is consistency and having it be an unencumbered time. I ensure that all of our teachers have planning time and do not expect that because special education teachers at times have smaller class sizes, that their planning time should be diminished. Planning time should also include their co-teachers and instructional aides."

Provide teachers with opportunities for professional development, opportunities to work on school-wide committees.

"I frequently post notices regarding local meetings of professional development organizations so that classroom personnel can take advantage of the networking and learning experiences that this interaction can provide. I encourage teachers to participate and ask if they can provide feedback to their colleagues regarding the nature and content of the professional development experience. I have found that teachers enjoy sharing their knowledge and I recognize them by giving them a structured time at our weekly staff meetings to disseminate what they have learned. I observe that teachers really feel good about themselves and their ability to convey knowledge to their colleagues. Their participation in professional development activities is recognized during their annual performance evaluations."

"I find it more difficult to involve special education teachers on school-wide committees which provide an opportunity for decision making. I have to actively recruit special education personnel. It is important to ensure that you have comprehensive representation on school-based teams."

Evaluate your staff consistently to ensure that the job demands of a particular position are consistent with the knowledge, interests, and skills, of the employee in the position.

"I take the employee appraisal process very seriously and I try to convey this to my staff. We all receive comprehensive training regarding completing employee appraisals. During this time, the teacher and I carefully go over his/her work responsibilities. We use written documentation and observation to get a sense of what the teacher's role truly is.

(Sometimes what is on paper is very different than what the educator actually does in the classroom.) The process of continuous assessment, and the ongoing communication mechanisms that we established ensure that there is consistency between what is expected by myself as the administrator and the expectations of the employee. I try to alleviate the fear that often characterizes the performance appraisal process. We view it more as a learning experience—a time to learn about whether the educator is experiencing a sense of satisfaction with his position and whether the job requirements are consistent with the knowledge, skills, and interests of the employee. Importantly, we change things if necessary based upon this performance appraisal. The paperwork just doesn't get filed in our human resource department—it serves as a blueprint for the teacher and myself. It is meaningful and I guess that is what is important. I also use this time as a one-on-one to learn about the employee's professional aspirations."

Ensure that the work environment is pleasant by providing personnel with time-out space such as a teacher's lounge and ample parking.

"This may sound trivial but, providing staff with ample parking has really made a difference. I provide teachers with a parking decal so they can park closer to the building and have purchased luggage carts for them to move their materials. Teachers no longer have to carry their heavy classroom materials long distances to the school building thus, when they arrive in the morning they are not disturbed by their long journey from their vehicles to our building. It may seem a little crazy, but since we moved the faculty parking lot to an area adjacent to the entrance to our building, staff appears less disgruntled upon their arrival in the morning. I guess it also helps that I ensure that there is fresh coffee (the good kind) and local newspapers available in staff lounges. It is a little expense that goes a long way toward employee satisfaction."

"We have a Social Sunshine Team within our building who provide doughnuts and bagels to staff and just do nice things for their colleagues. I provide a small budget for the sunshine team to purchase inexpensive items for staff such as candy or pencils. They periodically leave notes, jokes, or words of encouragement with these small gifts in staff mailboxes."

"We have a Silver Lining Club in our school, a team of two or three teachers who just do nice things for their co-workers. They place stress reliever anecdotes and jokes in staff mailboxes—little things that go a long way toward a better work environment."

"I provide door prizes at staff meetings—things such as highlighters and other classroom materials brighten everyone's day."

Provide educators with resources, including libraries and other informational materials.

"As a school-based administrator, we are always wrestling with the costs of professional development and curriculum materials. I felt it was important for staff to have a place within this building where they can have access to professional development materials. With very little cost, I turned a small storage area into our professional resource library. I wrote letters to acquire complimentary materials from professional development organizations, book publishers, and materials centers to start a reference area. This resource room has really snowballed. We have all of our staff bringing in materials and writing letters to publishers to acquire inexpensive materials. I really think that our staff is taking ownership for this project and work hard to maintain the reference material available. Now staff don't have to waste

"We have a Silver Lining Club in our school, a team of two or three teachers who just do nice things for their co-workers. They place stress reliever anecdotes and jokes in staff mailboxes—little things that go a long way toward a better work environment."

their time searching for reference materials, they take great pride in going to the resource library and acquiring the materials that they need in an expedient manner."

"I provide teachers with a resource notebook at the beginning of the school year. I frequently send articles and various reference materials electronically to them and encourage them to download the information and place it in their notebooks as a continuing reference."

Provide staff with information and resources regarding the how-to's of school administrative practices.

"In the beginning of the school-year, I provide all employees with a loose-leaf notebook with our district's operations and policies. However, this notebook is personalized by each professional with policy material that they deem important to their own roles. I frequently provide staff with school policy information via electronic newsletters. Staff is encouraged to print these references and include them in their notebooks. This notebook becomes an operations manual and is a one-stop reference to district-wide administrative policies and procedures."

"I provide my faculty with a Yellow-pages of resources both within and outside of our building and district. Sometimes I think that teaching professionals may be too intimidated to seek the assistance of district-wide administrators to obtain resource information. This directory is another tool that enables a teacher to utilize the most appropriate resources available."

Establish relationships with local university-based personnel preparation programs in your area.

"I initiate contact with the teacher educators in colleges and universities in my area. The relationships established are mutually beneficial and provide a great opportunity to share information and resources. I provide university-based teacher educators with feedback regarding personnel preparation issues, both formally and informally. We also attend professional development meetings together as an additional means of maintaining our communication."

III. Strategies District-Wide Administrators Can Implement

Educate all principals, assistant principals, and center principals regarding roles and responsibilities of special education personnel.

"I like to have a panel of teachers and related services personnel on the agenda of one of our meetings as a way to introduce administrators to topics within special education. I typically follow-up the meeting with written documentation containing information about a specific topic."

"I think it is important that principals and teachers receive the same documentation related to roles and responsibilities so that everyone has the same information as the basis of developing expectations."

"Make sure that policy information comes from only one source, usually the superintendent's office, so that everyone hears the same thing."

Provide opportunities for teacher networking outside of the school building—have a retreat for professional development and social activities, explore the possibility of teacher exchange programs.

"We had a wonderful teacher exchange program where teachers who were interested in teaching in another school and in other fields (had to possess appropriate certification) for one school year could apply to

"I like to have a panel of teachers and related services personnel on the agenda of one of our meetings as a way to introduce administrators to topics within special education."

a designated central administrator. When even exchanges could be made participating principals and teachers met for a briefing on program responsibilities. Part of the agreement for the exchange program was that teachers had to return to their previous school after the 1 year exchange."

"We provide financial support to teachers to participate in professional development programs. If the training is on a Saturday, we pay them. We provide food, give them recertification points, and encourage participation by teachers and paraeducators. This is done on a district-wide level to encourage interaction and information exchange between the diversity of professionals within our system's schools."

Provide professional development opportunities related to teaching educators advocacy skills and general management skills, such as scheduling, and other technical aspects of their positions, and ensure that there are communication mechanisms within the district to share information.

"We ensure that all professional development materials are accessible to our teaching personnel. We keep the resource/materials library open during evening hours and during the weekend to ensure that staff have opportunities to visit these district facilities."

"I set up a vendor day whereby retail vendors of curriculum and resource materials were invited in to share their materials with school personnel. This event was planned jointly with a neighboring school district to defray costs and encourages collaboration between the professionals representing each of our respective districts."

"We encourage electronic teacher discussion groups which is a cost-effective and time-efficient mechanism to exchange information. We also download national satellite teleconferences put on by professional associations that focus on specific topics with special education and encourage district-wide participation."

Support participation in professional organizations and national teacher associations.

"We have implemented share-fare and 'make and take' programs to encourage participation in national professional organizations. We will partially reimburse teaching professionals for their participation in professional organizations. Educators are encouraged to bring materials back to the district from professional meetings and conferences and disseminate this information to their colleagues."

Ensure that school districts match grants that principals and school-based personnel receive.

"We have a matching funds program within our district whereby we match any moneys that individuals or teams receive from external funding sources. This encourages personnel to go after money that may be available through federal, state, or private resources."

Provide district employees with career path options that enable classroom personnel to move into school-based administrative and district-positions.

"Our teacher exchange program enables educators to be exposed to administrative positions as a possible career advancement opportunity. The selection of candidates for the administrative positions is competitive. Participants are rewarded with release time in order to fulfill their administrative role. We frequently work with university-based graduate programs in administration to complement the knowledge that a participant gains through this experiential learning program."

"We encourage electronic teacher discussion groups which is a cost-effective and time-efficient mechanism to exchange information. We also download national satellite teleconferences put on by professional associations that focus on... special education and encourage district wide participation."

"I ensure that there is ongoing dialog and impress upon school-based personnel that facilitating realistic expectations regarding workscope and accountability is a major goal."

Recognize Master Teacher status amongst your education personnel.

"We provide our Master Teachers with recognition through opportunities to move around to various teaching positions within the district. This provides them with reinforcement as they share their expertise with their peers. Additionally, the interaction between Master Teachers and their colleagues serves as a stimulus for nonmaster teachers to strive for professional growth and excellence."

Ensure that there are system-wide professional development programs in place that are accessible to all personnel.

"It helps to know about the courses and programs offered at the higher education institutions in your area. Establish structured communication mechanisms between your district and the college in order to facilitate opportunities for district personnel to participate in these university-based professional development experiences."

Ensure that central district personnel and principals have mutually realistic expectations regarding workscope and accountability regarding special education personnel.

"I ensure that there is ongoing dialog and impress upon school-based personnel that facilitating realistic expectations regarding workscope and accountability is a major goal. This focus on these issues regarding work responsibilities and expectations is not a one-shot approach and must be intertwined within daily routine and practice."

"We also have a district-wide retreat for central office administrators and principals. The interaction between these two professional groups facilitates dialog and the development of strategies related to understanding roles, work responsibilities, and issues of accountability."

School-wide administrators need to communicate to all personnel the importance of special education services and how these services fit in within the district function and the educational picture.

"We arranged for a panel of former students who had received special education services to speak at a district administrator meeting regarding their experiences and the impact that their placements had upon their lives."

"Public relations is important. I go out of my way to report the successes of students receiving special education services. I ensure that information about special education, including the accomplishments of students and teachers, is highlighted in district-wide and parent newsletters and other informational vehicles, such as our website."

District administrators need to ensure that all special education personnel feel that they can and do participate in all district-wide projects and programs.

"I ensure that all staff, including special education personnel, receive district-wide communications and invitations to participate in activities at the district level. It is important that all personnel know what is going on so they can make informed decisions regarding their own professional development and importantly, make informed decisions regarding the educational services that are rendered to students with disabilities within our system."

- *"Our district school board needs to be informed regarding special education services. I frequently provide special education teachers with the opportunity to share their experiences with school board members and parents at board meeting spotlight sessions."*
- *"Exposure of special education services at school board meetings may impact upon fiscal allocations for special education programs. I encourage parents of students receiving special education services to share their stories with school board members and the community during board meetings."*
- *"We ensure that there is representation by all education disciplines on all district-wide committees and advisory groups, and ensure that special education personnel are part of the decision making process regarding school-wide curriculum and textbook materials."*

Ensure that there is a district-wide induction program available to new personnel.

- *"We have a structured new teacher orientation and induction program within our district that is appropriated the necessary funds to ensure its successful operation. We provide teachers the opportunity for discussion and information exchange both informally and formally for a year or more. Our induction program includes not only the technical and operational side of being a teacher in our district (such as how to find out about snow days), but includes an opportunity for the beginning teacher to establish a mentoring relationship with a seasoned professional. This relationship lasts well beyond the induction period and is important for the ongoing job and personal satisfaction of our teaching professionals as they advance throughout their careers in our district."*

Establish and maintain optimum communication with local colleges and universities.

- *"Positive communication between higher education institutions in your area and your district is important to enable classroom-personnel to actively engage in professional development opportunities offered by these institutions. A positive relationship will also help with recruitment of future district personnel. It is important to be clear regarding your district's hiring process regarding interns. In our district, interns are not automatically hired and must undergo a comprehensive application process. By communicating with university professors and the students prior to the internship, neither party will have the expectation that just because they completed an internship they will be automatically employed."*

"Positive communication between higher education institutions in your area and your district is important to enable classroom-personnel to actively engage in professional development opportunities offered by these institutions. A positive relationship will also help with recruitment of future district personnel."

Resources

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Request for Additional Retention Strategies

THE NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR PROFESSIONS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Description of Strategies Within Local Education Agencies Designed to Retain Special Education and Related Services Personnel

Name of Person Completing Form: _____

Name of District: _____

Address: _____

_____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

Description of Retention Activities

Overview of Activity: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Materials/Personnel Needed: _____

_____

Duration of Activity: _____

Process: _____

PLEASE PHOTOCOPY AND ATTACH ALL SHEETS

NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE FOR *Professions* IN *Special Education*

CEC

The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education
The Council for Exceptional Children
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www.specialedcareers.org

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